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EXCAVATIONS NEAR ST ABB'S HEAD, BERWICKSHIRE, 1980

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#### INTRODUCTION

Limited excavations were carried out in September 1980, by students from the University of Glasgow under the direction of LA, on two sites near St Abb's Head, Coldingham: Kirk Hill (NGR NT 91 68) and Rampart Hall (NGR NT 91 69). The objective was to locate and identify the nature of the secular fortification implied in the seventh-century name Colodaenburgh. The research was funded by the Russell Trust, the Hunter Archaeological Trust and the University of Glasgow. This work was part of a larger programme of research, not on early monastic sites, but on Early Historic fortifications in Scotland (Alcock 1981a). Trial excavations in this research programme have also taken place at Dumbarton, Dundurn, Dunnottar, Dun Ollaigh, Forteviot and Urquhart.

The following report was written by SP on the basis of preliminary statements and the Level I site records, but in full consultation with LA, with whom lies ultimate responsibility for the text. It incorporates, and here acknowledges, the results and conclusions of recent survey by the staff of the RCAHMS, in particular Geoffrey Stell and Marilyn Brown.

The site records have been deposited in the Archives of Glasgow University, and the finds with the National Museums of Scotland. The dressed stones (finds cat nos 30-39) were reburied on site.

#### HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS

The earliest reference to Colodaesburg appears to be in Eddius's Life of Wilfrid (VW 39), where he tells of the Northumbrian king and queen coming to the monastery quod Colodaesburg dicitur, 'which is called "Colud's fort or town" and 'over which presided a very discrete abbess called Aebbe, the sister of King Oswiu'. Bede, writing rather later about the double monastery of St Aebbe, calls it Coludi urbs in both the Ecclesiastical History (HE iv, 19; iv, 25) and in his Life of St Cuthbert (VP 10). The implication would seem to be that the monastery had originally been a fortified place -burg in Old English, urbs in Latin - which had subsequently been made over to the church (see Campbell 1979b, 43 for comparison of the use of burg and urbs by Eddius and Bede). Reculver in Kent, Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex, and Burgh Castle, Norfolk, are other Anglo-Saxon examples of this practice, while in Ireland St Mochaol's monastery at Nendrum, Co Down, is a probable example of a religious foundation set within an earlier fortification (Lawlor 1925).

Alcock (1981a) originally considered that the first fort would have been a British, not an Anglo-Saxon work, because there is little interest in hill-forts or other fortified places until the burh-building of late Saxon times, and certainly no evidence at all that the early Anglo-Saxons built fortifications (Alcock 1978; but see below). Against this it might be argued that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the year AD 547 gives an apparently circumstantial account of the building of Bamburgh by Ida, first Anglian ruler of Bernicia. This, we are told, was first defended with a hedge or palisade, and subsequently with a wall. But Hunter Blair long ago pointed out that the account of Ida building Bamburgh is 'a tradition where existing MS evidence is not older than the eleventh century', and adduced other reasons for scepticism (1954, 147-9).

On the other hand, the ninth-century Historia Brittonum (HB),

which in this case incorporates earlier British sources (Jackson 1963), provides a British name for Bamburgh: Dinguoaroy. The din- element clearly implies a fort; and from this it is a reasonable inference that Bamburgh was a pre-Anglian, British promontory fort which was seized by Ida or granted to him at a formative stage in the Bernician dynasty (Alcock 1981a; b).

Returning to Colodaesburg; there was every reason to believe that this likewise was a pre-Anglian, British fort, although its name, as it has come down to us, is certainly not British. It does not help to suggest that Colud or Colod is the personal name of its builder, since we have no record of such a person. It might be that Colodaesburg is a translation of a British form Caer Golud, as Crawford (1934) suggested. Crawford himself had found Caer Golud in the Book of Taliesin, and he therefore considered this to be a reference going back to the late sixth or early seventh century. But the poem in which the lines 'except seven, none returned from Caer Golud' occur had been removed as early as 1918 from the corpus which scholars of early Welsh poetry were prepared to regard as the authentic work of the bard Taliesin (Morris-Jones 1918); nor has more recent work restored it (Williams 1968). Moreover, Jackson was doubtful about this equation anyway, because Caer Golud occurs along with several other Caer names which appear to represent the Celtic Otherworld (Jackson 1959, 15-6). Thus this poetic reference is of no historical assistance.

If we accept that Urbs Coludi was originally a British fort, we have a preliminary clue about the kind of site we should be seeking. The literary sources add further hints. The sea-shore must be sufficiently accessible for Cuthbert to have gone down at night to immerse himself in the sea 'above whose shores the monastery was built', as Bede tells us that he did in his Life of that saint (VP 10). Bede's source was an anonymous Life of the saint, written at Lindisfarne (VA), which Colgrave (1940,4) considers fairly reliable, with its constant references to places and people known to the original

reader. Moreover, the fort must have been large enough to have enclosed the structures of a double monastery. Bede again refers to its lofty buildings, aedificia illius sublimiter erecta (HE iv, 25), which appear to have included both public and private ones. There would certainly have been a church, or one or more oratories. Bede mentions also individual cells and sleeping places, singulorum casas et lectos, as well as 'little houses for praying or reading', domunculae quae ad orandum et legendum factae sunt. Admittedly this description is embedded in a miracle story, and one may suspect a strong element of literary convention, although Bede quotes as his source a fellow priest called Eadgisl, who had actually lived in the monastery at Colodaesburg. Cramp certainly finds here a valid account of a seventh-century monastery combining communal buildings and individual cells (Cramp 1976, 206-7).

According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Text E, s.a. 679) and Bede (HE iv, 25) the monastery of St Aebbe was destroyed by 'divine fire', either fire or lightning. After this, according to Bede, the monastery was deserted by most of its inhabitants because it was in ruins. Plummer (1899, II, 31) considers 679 too early for the destruction of the monastery (Bede, Florence of Worcester and Henry of Huntingdon all omit the date). There are two pointers to a later date. Firstly, Eddius (VW 39) relates how during the visit of Ecgfrith and his queen (Eorwenburh, not Aethelthryth who had retired to Colodaesburg in 672), the queen was taken ill, and only after the king had been persuaded to release Bishop Wilfrid from imprisonment did she recover. Since Wilfrid had not been imprisoned until 680 (Colgrave 1927, 174) the monastery must have been in existence at this time. Secondly, Bede declares that the fire at Colodaesburg did not take place until after Aebbe's death (HE iv, 25) and she was still alive in 681 (Colgrave 1927, 174) or 683 (Anderson 1908, 39). Nonetheless, it seems likely that the destruction occurred not long after 681.

Finally, Matthew of Paris refers s.a. 870 to a Viking attack by

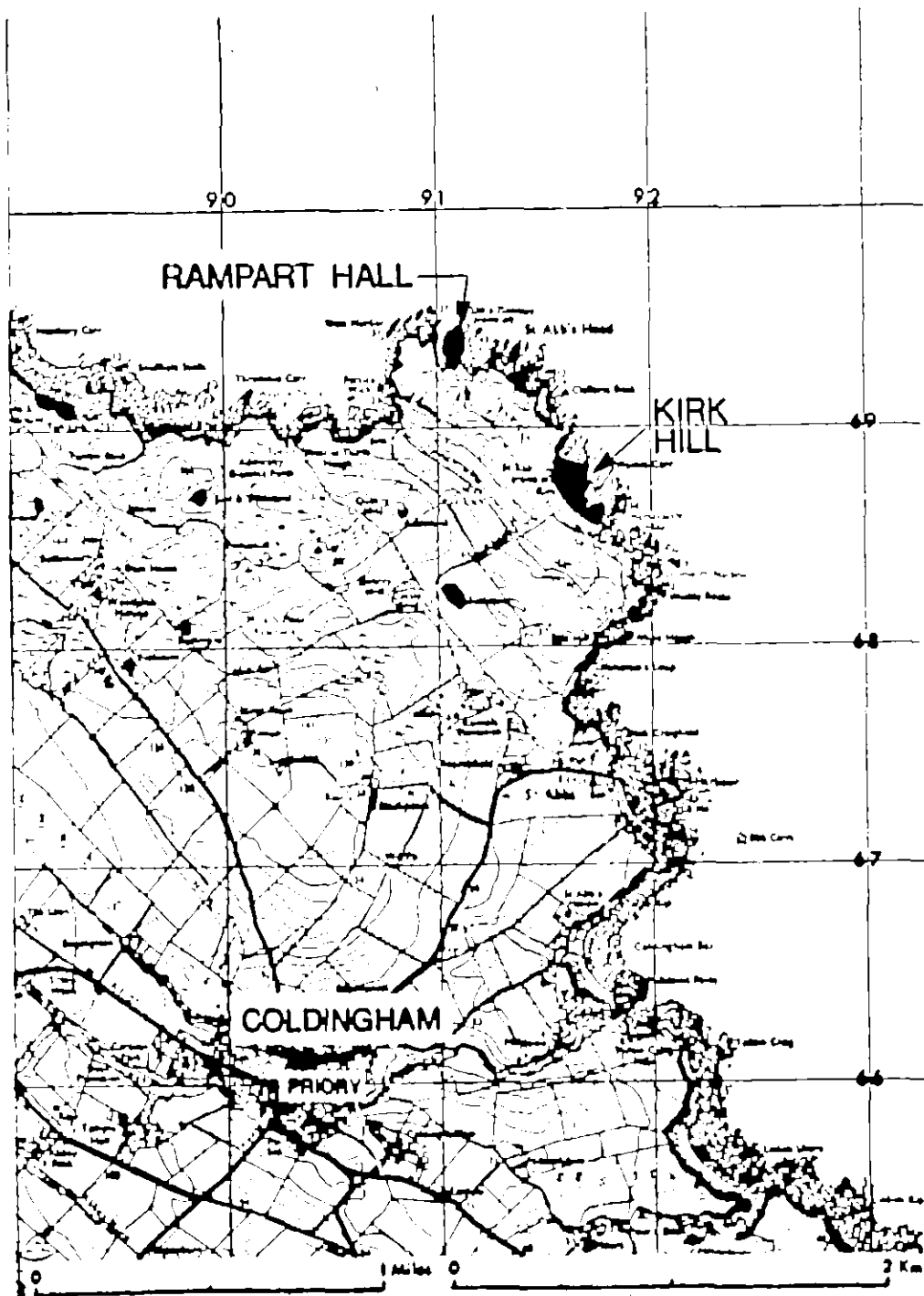
Inguar and Hubba on a monastery at Coldingham, which was presided over by an abbess named Aebbe (Anderson 1908, 61-2). Matthew's source was the Flores Historiarum of Roger Wendover, his predecessor at St Albans. The ultimate source of these thirteenth-century reports is unknown, but no reliability can be placed upon this account, which is undoubtedly simply a hagiographical topos; Smyth (in litt to SF) considers that this account of the fate of the Coldingham nuns is similar to the very late account of Inguar's Viking attack on Crowland, in the Chronicle of Crowland.

#### TOPOGRAPHICAL IDENTIFICATION OF COLODAESBURG

In seeking to identify the general location of the monastery there are two main clues. Firstly, there is the name Colodaesburg. Whilst there is no modern place with the name, Nicolaisen has shown that Coldingham ultimately derives from it (Nicolaisen 1976, 20-1; 72-3). Secondly, Bede writes of the monasterium Aebbae abbatissae (HE iv 19). Aebbe is, in fact, the only historically documented abbess of the monastery. It can therefore be no coincidence that St Abb's village and headland lie just to the north of Coldingham village; they indicate a site somewhere in this vicinity.

It is considered by some (eg Thomson 1977) that Coldingham, with its twelfth-century priory, could have been Colodaesburg. Ninth-century finds, including a cross-shaft with interlace (Glen 1876) and a possible eighth-century inscribed sandstone block (Noble 1973), have been discovered in the vicinity of the Priory. There is no doubt that a monastery was established there, probably after the late seventh-century fire, but Coldingham Priory, which is approximately two km from the sea, could not fit Bede's description of Urbs Coludi.

Our attention is thus focused on the vicinity of St Abb's Head, which is located at the easterly end of the Lammermuir Hills (illus 11). The general topography consists of lowlands with gentle and



ILLUS 11 Location map for Coldingham, Kirk Hill and Rampart Hall. Other forts and settlements of the pre-Roman Iron Age are also indicated. (Based on the OS 1:2500 map, *Crown Copyright*)



complex slopes, slightly to moderately rocky, with a soil cover of drifts derived from the Lower Paleozoic greywackes and shales. Recent survey ascribes the land to type 52, and only suited to grasslands and rough grazing. However, the adjacent land around nearby Coldingham and St Abb's village (type 31) is of better quality. (Bown and Shipley 1982).

Over the past century, the identification of St Abbe's monastery, enshrined on the O.S. map, has been with 'Rampart Hall', a fortified coastal promontory approximately 0.3 km north-west of St Abb's Head lighthouse (NGR NT 91 69) (illus 12). The major building now visible, of rectangular plan and local rubble, appears on the O.S. 1:2,500 map as 'St Abb's Nunnery, remains of'. It has long been considered to be a chapel of the seventh or later centuries (MacGibbon and Ross 1896, I, 437). This identification was endorsed, for instance, by O G S Crawford, who saw the defence-work as a sub-Roman mortared wall (Crawford 1934, 203). A C Thomas also accepted the identification (Thomas 1971, 35-6).

'Rampart Hall' is, as stated above, a coastal promontory with a comparatively narrow neck. This is traversed by a dry and partly rock-cut ditch, behind which the ground level rises to a gently rounded crest and afterwards falls away to seaward, flanked by high and quite inaccessible cliffs along which no additional defences have been noted. There is no indication of a water supply nor evidence of intensive use of the interior ground for building, enclosure or cultivation (ASH Berwicks, item 516); low banks and scatters of stony debris indicate only a few lesser buildings or enclosures.

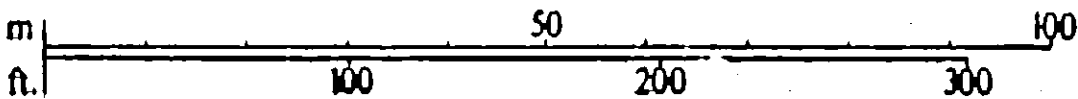
Three main problems are posed by the identification of this site as Coloddesburg.

- (i) The promontory seems too small, and the amount of level ground altogether too restricted to hold a double monastery.
- (ii) Access to the sea as required by Bede's story about Guthbert is impossible.



ILLUS 127

'RAMPART HALL', ST. ABB'S HEAD  
NT 911694



1 : D10

(iii) The supposed remains of St Abb's nunnery have been independently identified by the Alcocks (Alcock and Alcock 1981,2) and the staff of the Royal Commission (ASM Berwicks, item 516) as a later medieval hall rather than an ecclesiastical building.

Aidan MacDonald has pointed out (in litt. to LA) that before the Ordnance Survey's identification, the traditional site had actually been Kirk Hill, 530m SE of the lighthouse of St Abb's Head (NGR NT 91 68). The local name is said to be 'The Burgh'. Here a Romano-British rim sherd, dated 150-250 AD (Hogg 1945) and a fragment of glass bangle (DES 1967, 17) had been picked up. A H A Hogg (1945) had discovered this site in about 1944 and considered it a more probable candidate for 'Cair Golud' than the westerly site with the mortared wall.

Kirk Hill occupies the summit of a hill which rises to a height of 79m OD, with the eastern side formed by vertical cliffs rising over 60m from the sea and the landward side consisting of steep grassy slopes with some rocky outcrops. All sides plunge off steeply, creating a naturally defended area of about three ha of fairly level ground; no great works would have been required to defend such a site. At the break of slope, the whole circuit, cliff edge to cliff edge (save for entrances within a few metres of the cliff at each end) is marked by traces of a rampart, apparently backed by a quarry ditch; where the rampart was no longer visible in profile the different types of vegetation indicated its line. It is also evident on aerial photographs (ASM Berwicks, item 449). In addition, before excavation, protruding lines of stones, tussocky vegetation, bare patches of eroding rampart core and intensive rabbit-burrowing, all bore witness to a massive bank.

The size of the Kirk Hill enclosure was obviously suitable for the extensive but unsystematic layout which might be expected at an early Anglian monastery (Cramp 1976; Rahtz 1976). Moreover, quantities of mortar in molehills on a level platform immediately north of the summit

indicated the former presence of masonry buildings, additional to the known remains of St Abb's medieval kirk and its enclosure (ASM Berwicks, item 449). Finally, at the south-east corner of the site there was ready access to a shingle beach; Cuthbert could have reached a convenient cove in less than five minutes. All these factors made Kirk Hill seem a more likely candidate for St Aebbe's monastery and the preceding Colodæsburg.

Before excavation it was evident that the situation and form of the enclosing rampart were in keeping with a pre-Anglian, British cliff-castle. Some of the occupation, suggested by nettles, might have belonged to this rather than to the Anglian monastery. Significant here is Hogg's discovery of a Romano-British coarse ware rim, apparently datable 150-250 AD, on Kirk Hill (Hogg 1945). This makes it possible that we have here not an Early Historic fortification, but rather a work initially of the pre-Roman or Roman Iron Age, which was derelict when St Aebbe, or her predecessor, founded the monastery.

#### THE 1960 EXCAVATIONS

##### THE PURPOSE OF THE EXCAVATIONS

The object of the excavations was to establish whether or not there had been a pre-monastic fortification, either a British cliff castle of pre-Roman or post-Roman date or an Anglian fortified settlement (urbs, burg), on either of the two suggested sites. Implicit in this was the examination of Crawford's remarkable claim (1934, 203) that the western promontory, Rampart Hall was defended by mortared masonry of sub-Roman date. In addition, the claim of the rectangular building at Rampart Hall to be St Aebbe's nunnery was to be examined.

Excavations were therefore carried out in three areas:

(A) the mortared wall of Rampart Hall

(B) the building within it

(C) across the rampart and supposed quarry ditch of Kirk Hill.

Owing to the unexpectedly large size of the Kirk Hill rampart, by far the major effort was devoted to that site.

#### A THE DEFENCES AT RAMPART HILL

The man-made defences here are of some pretensions (illus 3, 12); the Royal Commission estimates the ditch to be at maximum c. 9m (30ft) broad and about 40m (130ft) in length. At the E end the rock-cut face rises to a height of some 3m above the bottom of the silted ditch. There is no clear evidence of an entrance, but the Royal Commission suggests that a slight depression and spread of material E of centre may mark its position. Two upstanding sections of mortared rubble walling exist on the W half of the inner lip of the ditch. At the NW end of the ditch is a substantial fragment c. 2.5m (8ft) wide, founded directly on the bedrock. It has a well-preserved rear face and traces of a front face. However, it was across part of the eastern section, a discontinuous stretch of facework, that trench 200 was located, in order to examine the walling and the area immediately behind it. The trench was essentially 7 by 2.5m, but with a 1 by 0.5m extension along the E side (illus 13). The area behind the rampart was only partly excavated.

Set into a slight trench, cut into a natural tough clay (205), was a raft of two courses of rubble embedded in a clay matrix (204). This was c. 2.8m (9ft) wide, approximately the same width as the unexcavated western block of masonry. It was carefully faced, both front and rear, with large boulders. Above this, and conforming with its leading edge was a wall of poorly mortared coarse rubble (206), c. 0.6m (2ft) wide. Hill-wash (201, 202) had developed on either side of the rampart. No finds were recovered.

LIST OF FEATURES IN TRENCH 200, ST ABB'S HEAD

Illus 13

S = Section P = Plan

201 Stiff brown hillwash (S).

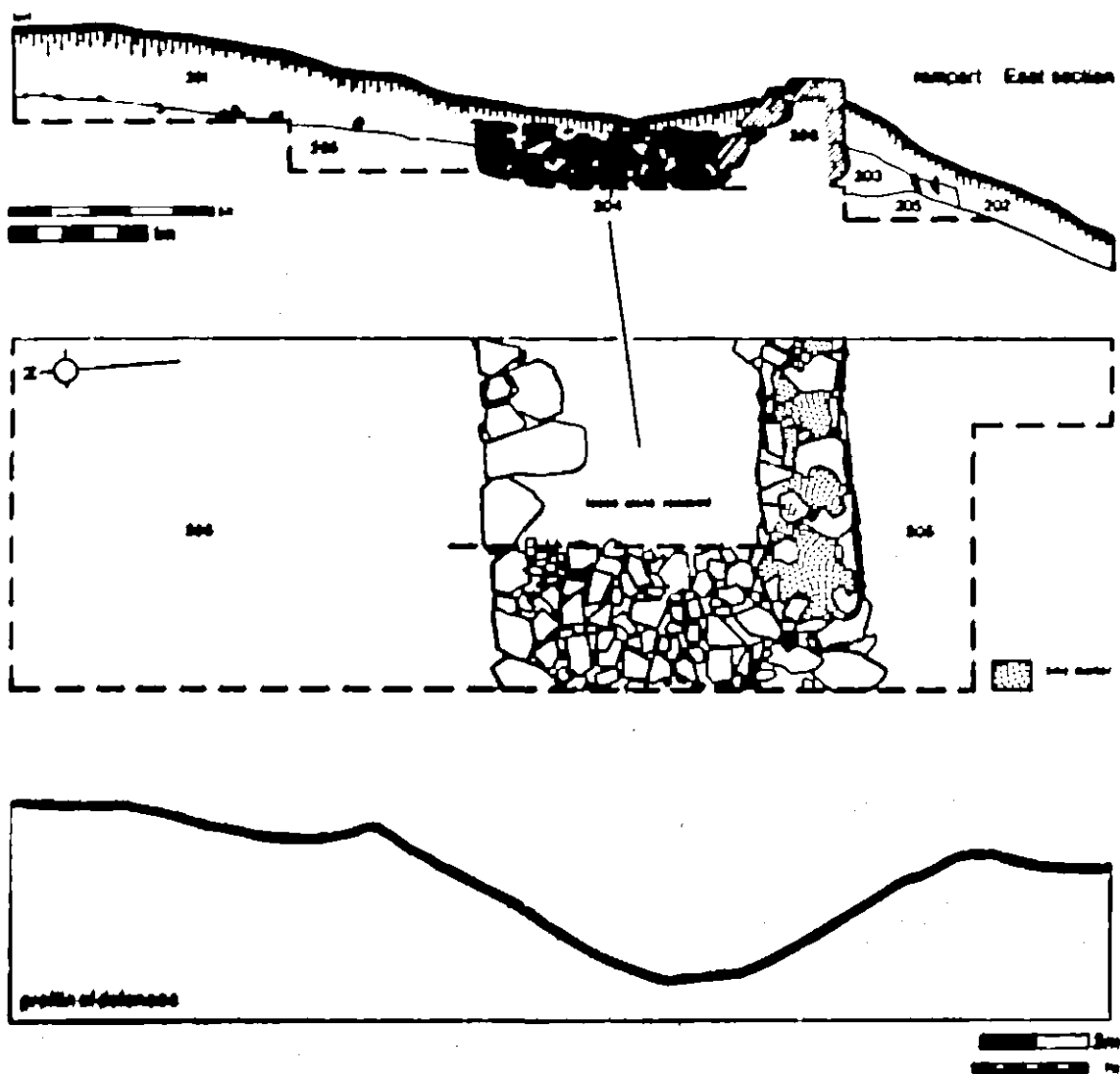
202 = 201 (S).

203 Bright red, compact clay with chippy inclusions. Redeposited natural (S).

204 Raft of stones (rubble core, faced front and rear), up to two courses high, in matrix of bright red stone-free clay (S,P).

205 Natural orange-red, compact clay (S,P).

206 Stone wall with limestone mortar matrix (S,P).



## DISCUSSION

Two interpretations are possible. (A) This is a unitary, but unfinished work, originally intended as a masonry wall, about 2.8m (9ft) wide, across the promontory; it was to be founded on solid rock at the exposed corner above the western ravine (and perhaps the eastern precipice as well), but elsewhere was to be based on a clay-bound raft; a foundation of rubble in a clay-matrix. Either, only part of the raft and the masonry wall was ever completed; or, if it had been completed, its subsequent destruction, decay or quarrying were extensive. (B) This is a work of three periods: (1) a clay-bound wall (204), an early (perhaps prehistoric) defence of the promontory; (2) an unfinished wall c. 2.5m (8ft) wide represented by the western block of masonry (unexcavated); (3) a feeble mortared wall (206) across the middle of the neck of the promontory. Since there is no clear difference between the mortar used in the masonry elements of (2) and (3), it is therefore likely that (3) is a reduced continuation of (2). Moreover, the widths of elements (1) and (2) are approximately the same, while (3) used the leading edge of (1) as its own face-line. These similarities between the three elements are so strong as to argue in favour of A, i.e. that this was a unitary work, probably contemporary with the so-called St Abb's Nunnery (see below).

## B ST ABB'S NUNNERY

The so-called St Abb's Nunnery is the principal surviving building on the promontory (illus 14). It occupies a site that slopes along its main axis from SW to NE, and although it stands close to the seaward tip of the promontory, it has a relatively sheltered position, partly protected by a ridge of rock along the NW flank. It is of elongated rectangular plan with an integral offset or projection at the lower NE end. From its position and shape this projection could have served

either as a latrine-chamber; or more likely, in the view of Stell and Brown, as a kitchen ingie, for which there are other known parallels in south-eastern Scotland.

This NE end is based on what appears to be a revetted platform, but this may in part represent an accumulation of midden deposits. The building's surviving walls, of local random rubble, either dry-stone or clay-bound (OS Record Card NT 96 NW 6), survive as well-defined footings just over about 1m (c. 4ft) in average width. The Royal Commission suggests two entrances, one towards the S end of the NW side-wall and possibly another towards the N end of the opposite wall. The SW end wall stands to a maximum internal height of 0.75m (c. 2ft 6 in), and it was across this that trench 100 was located to test the nature of a supposed tomb recess. The trench measured 4 x 3m.

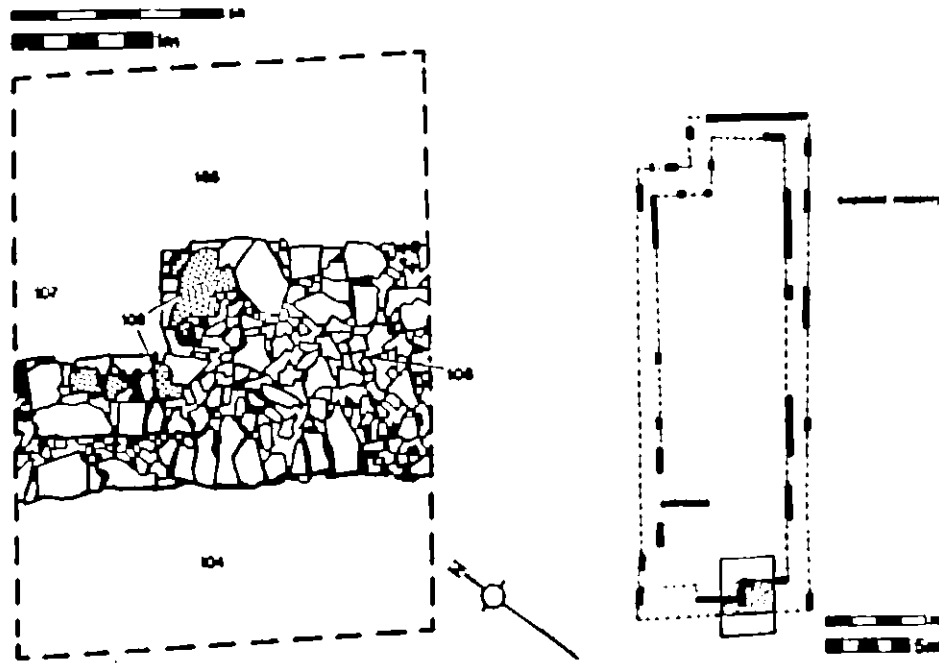
The principal excavated feature was a wall (106; illus 14) of dry or clay-bound rubble about 1.6m (5ft 3in) wide. It was laid in a trench cut into the sloping subsoil, with an outer facing of heavy, well-laid blocks, but the core consisted of rubble. Into this was set a rectangular recess (107) c. 0.8m (2ft 8in) deep. Although there was no evidence of burning, this was interpreted as a rural fire-place (see below). The arrangement of the walling around this recess, and the presence of mortar (108) apparently not used anywhere else in the building, suggest that this was an addition to an otherwise clay-bound wall. The mortar was not inconsistent with that used in the rampart wall (see above), and it is probable that both wall and building are contemporary.

To either side of the wall, but especially in the interior of the building, lay a tumble of stones (102, 103) analogous in size to the wall itself, and obviously representing the collapsed debris of some part of the building.

Both wall and debris lay directly on a weathered bedrock of clean, dense, stiff, chippy clay (105) with no signs of trampling or other usage. From this it is inferred that the building originally had



a flagged floor, and that on its abandonment the flags were lifted. It is therefore not surprising that the recess yielded no evidence for use as a fireplace or for any alternative function. This trench produced no finds.



ILLUS 14 St Abb's Head, Trench 100 - plan

LIST OF FEATURES IN TRENCH 100, ST ABB'S HEAD

Illus 14 (fiche 1 :E5 )

P = Plan

- 101 Red-brown friable soil extending over whole trench. Hill-wash.
- 102 Concentration of pitched blocks, within 101, to exterior of building. Structural collapse outside building.
- 103 Quarried stone of varying size, within matrix of a firm, sticky silty-clay incorporating rounded ORS fragments. Structural collapse into building interior.
- 104 Under 101 and 102, a stiff, red clay containing a concentration of small broken pebble fragments. Natural to exterior of building (P).
- 105 = 104. Natural clay inside building (P).
- 106 Stone wall, laid in a trench, with outer facing of heavy, well-laid blocks, and core of rubble (P).
- 107 Inset recess in 106 (c. 0.8m deep), faced with a double thickness of worked stones, in a mortar matrix (108) (P).
- 108 Mortar matrix.

## **DISCUSSION**

There is no justification for considering 'St Abb's Nunnery' to be an ecclesiastical rather than a secular building. The recess is almost certainly a fire-place and not a tomb recess, as has sometimes been suggested. Indeed, the building has every indication of being a late medieval hall rather than an early Christian monastic building, although the ground-floor hall is an unusual form in Scotland.

## **SUMMARY**

Taking into account the landward defences, and the unusual dispersed layout (there are surface indications of several lesser buildings or enclosures on the site (illus 12)), the Royal Commission considers that the site possesses a number of characteristics reasonably familiar in a late or sub-medieval context, and that in their existing form the visible remains are those of a defended promontory-refuge, ascribable perhaps to the latter half of a broad 1300-1600 date-range. Parallels are drawn between this site and Fast Castle, another promontory site (NT 86 71) some 5.5 km to the NW. Although this was more intensively used in the late and sub-medieval periods, it nevertheless shares similarities in general character and setting. Apart from the record that Rampart Hill (assuming that it has been correctly identified) was ruinous in 1771 (ASM Berwicks no 516), no documentary evidence is known for the site. This is not to say, however, that investigations by a historian in this field might not come up with further relevant information.

## **C KIRK HILL**

A trench 19.8m long was sited across the NW sector of the Kirk Hill rampart, its supposed internal quarry ditch and a part of the



ILLUS 15 KIRE HILL: overall plan by RCAMS. Crown Copyright

interior (illus 15). Although laid out to a width of 3m, it was only excavated to the full width in order to explore particular features (illus 17). For much of the trench, only a 2m width was excavated; because of the unexpected scale of the work, the deeper parts of the trench were only 1m wide. Inevitably, it must be stressed, therefore, that both observation and interpretation are even more tenuous than is normal when data are derived from a single cross-rampart cutting.

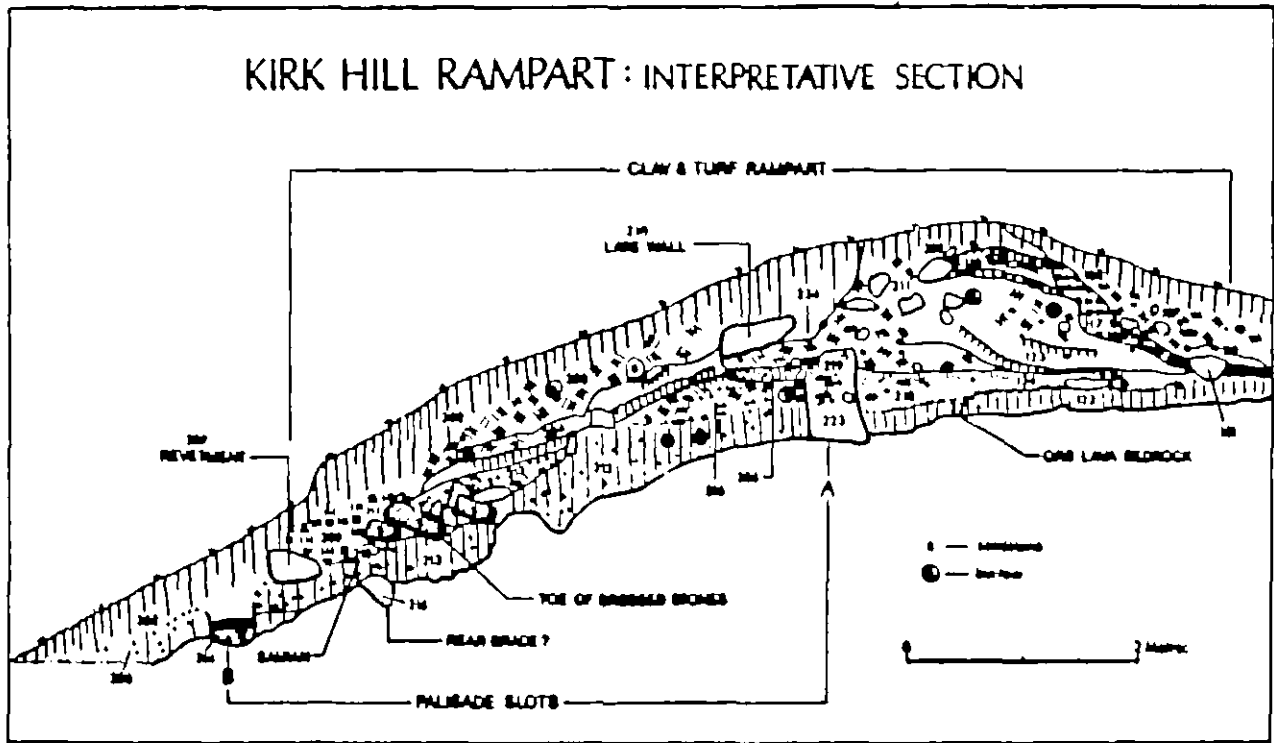
Three, (or possibly five), phases of activity on the ramparts were noted (illus 16). These can be summarised as follows:

- Period 1 The construction of either a double palisade or two successive single wooden palisades.
- Period 2 The construction of a massive turf rampart with a toe of dressed blocks, superimposed on the ruins of Period 1. As a subsidiary phase, 2B, a stone revetment was added at the front.
- Period 3 A second revetment or wall was constructed near the crest of the turf rampart.

#### **RAMPART PERIOD 1**

Extending under the rampart, and lying directly on top of the ORS Lava bedrock was a dark, organically-rich soil with a good crumb structure (122, 213, 221). This was possibly a cultivation layer, despite the fact that it was free of plough-eroded bedrock washing down the slope.

Cut through the 'cultivation layer' and into the bedrock were two clear palisade trenches (illus 16). The lower of these (214), palisade B (phase 1A), had a slightly irregular outline, but averaged about 400mm wide and 280mm deep. Aligned and well-spaced packing stones ran along the upper side of the slot, which had a compact stony fill. The packing stones were undisturbed, suggesting that the posts had rotted



ILLUS 16 Interpretation of rampart section on Kirk Hill

in situ. Slightly to the rear of this slot was a single sub-rectangular rock-cut hole (215) with a dark fill, measuring c.320 by 430mm and 250mm in depth. Its rear side was vertical, but the opposite side sloped diagonally towards the forward slot. This had probably held a post which braced the front revetment. A second, parallel, slot (223), palisade A (phase 1B), was discovered c.5.1m away, at the break of slope. This was c.440mm wide by 800mm deep, and had a more gravelly fill. It was cut not only through the cultivation layer, but through a superimposed layer of dark brown clayey soil with some concentrations of pebbles (124, 216, 218). This formed a low bank on the crest of the natural slope: most probably a lynchet. Alternatively, a bank was constructed around the palisade posts to reinforce them on the line of the upper palisade. Such low banks are known in association with double palisades, for instance at Harehope (Feachem 1962, fig 7 and below). At the bottom of this layer was a concentration of small pebbles, probably the result of worm-sorting of the ploughed horizon.

It is not clear whether these two trenches represent successive single palisades, or a single-phase double palisade. It is apparent, however, that the upper palisade had been destroyed by fire, whereas there was no such evidence for burning in the front palisade. Although the evidence from a 3m trench is not necessarily representative of the whole length of the defences, this would suggest that two successive palisades are represented; but there is no evidence as to which is older. The dark upper fill of the feature (219) contained some charcoal, and a hard-packed black soil (205) with large quantities of charcoal lay slumped in front of the slot, and may represent debris, albeit of a somewhat limited nature, from the collapse of the burnt palisade. A sample of c.200g of mixed charcoal was collected for radiocarbon dating. This was analysed and identified by Mrs Camilla Dickson (Appendix I).

The charcoal consisted predominantly of Q. agr. (oak), from both stems or branches and also large timbers: In addition there was



Corylus (hazel), Salix (willow) and Betula (birch) and also some unidentified small fragments. The oak had probably formed the main structural timbers for the palisade. Two hypotheses are suggested for the mixed smaller fragments: (i) they were a wattle infilling between the large structural timbers; (ii) they were brushwood employed in the destruction of the timber palisade.

#### RADIOCARBON DATING

A sample of oak (31g) was counted separately, while the remainder of mixed charcoal provided two dates.

GU-1387	Charcoal ( <u>Quercus</u> )	1395 ± 60	570-760 AD
		$\delta^{13}\text{C}_1$ -25.6‰	
GU-1388	Mixed charcoal	1285 ± 60	610-880 AD
		$\delta^{13}\text{C}_1$ -25.7‰	
GU-1389	Mixed charcoal	1265 ± 60	615-885 AD
		$\delta^{13}\text{C}_1$ -25.7‰	

All dates were calculated on the 5568 half-life and calibrated to the 2-sigma, 95% certainty, level using Klein et al 1982.

It is likely that the oak came from large structural timbers, and the other woods from lighter infilling, which would be consistent with the older date for the Quercus sample. Thus in seeking the true date for the palisade (223) the Quercus date can be ignored. Radiocarbon dates give an estimate of the date, in years bp, at which an organism died. Naturally, in a broad timber, such as an oak beam, parts of the tree have been dying each year, and thus a date derived from it will vary according to which part of the tree the sample came from. However, the timber used for the lighter infilling of the palisade would have been felled whilst still young. Thus there would be less likelihood of any discrepancy between any dates derived from it, and the date of felling, and by inference the construction of the palisade. If the two other dates, being from one sample, are averaged (using

Gillespie 1984), they give  $1275 \pm 85$  bp at the  $\pm 2$ -sigma level. If this is then calibrated, using Klein et al 1982, then at the 2-sigma level we have a date-bracket of 590-900 AD. The implications of this date are discussed below.

## RAMPART PERIOD 2

Not long after the destruction of the Period 1 palisades a rampart of turf was constructed (Phase 2A). A toe of tightly pitched stones (206), many of them quarry-dressed sandstone blocks, was bedded into 213, a metre or so behind where the original forward palisade had stood. The dressed stones included an example with the remains of two sockets along one edge, and another with an oblique rebate (finds cat nos 30-9; illus 8). Above this a rampart of turf and clay was constructed (110, 123, 203, 204, 211); orange clayey soils and loams alternated with humic bands of turf. Stones, some of them quite large, were incorporated into the make-up. The rear of this rampart, which extended over 3m further back than the rear palisade of Period 1, was contained by a boulder kerb consisting of a band of stones running across the trench (121). In addition, the rear was reinforced by a clay capping (117), some of which subsequently eroded over the kerb. At the outer face of the rampart, in front of the stone toe, a compact orangey soil (209) accumulated, possibly the more eroded remains of a similar capping (but possibly related to the phase 2B repairs - see below). This rampart was of a considerable size: its overall width was 8m and its overall height, even in the present eroded state, is over 3m. It is suggested below that the construction of this bank resulted in the large-scale stripping of turves from the hill, and this may therefore account for the thin soil cover in the interior.

At some time during Period 2, layers (119, 120) began to accumulate behind the bank, the result of the erosion of the bank itself, and possibly of later cultivation.

At some stage it became necessary to repair the front of the Period 2A turf-stack rampart. One, or in places two, courses of large boulders traversed the trench (207; Period 2B; illus 9). Given the steepness of the slope, however, there had presumably been further courses originally; these may have been removed, or pushed down the hill. The suggested clay capping (209) may belong to this stage or to the collapse from the Period 2A construction.

### RAMPART PERIOD 3

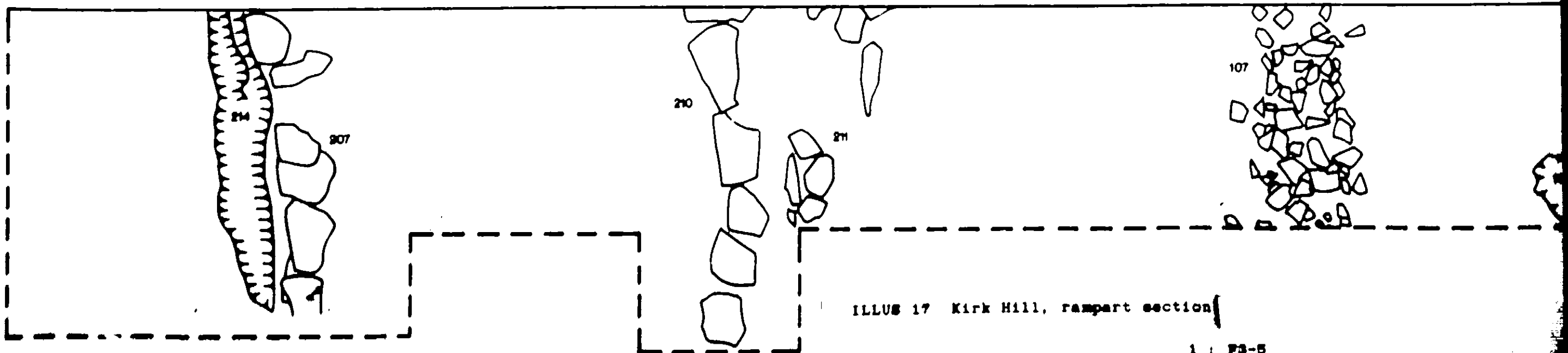
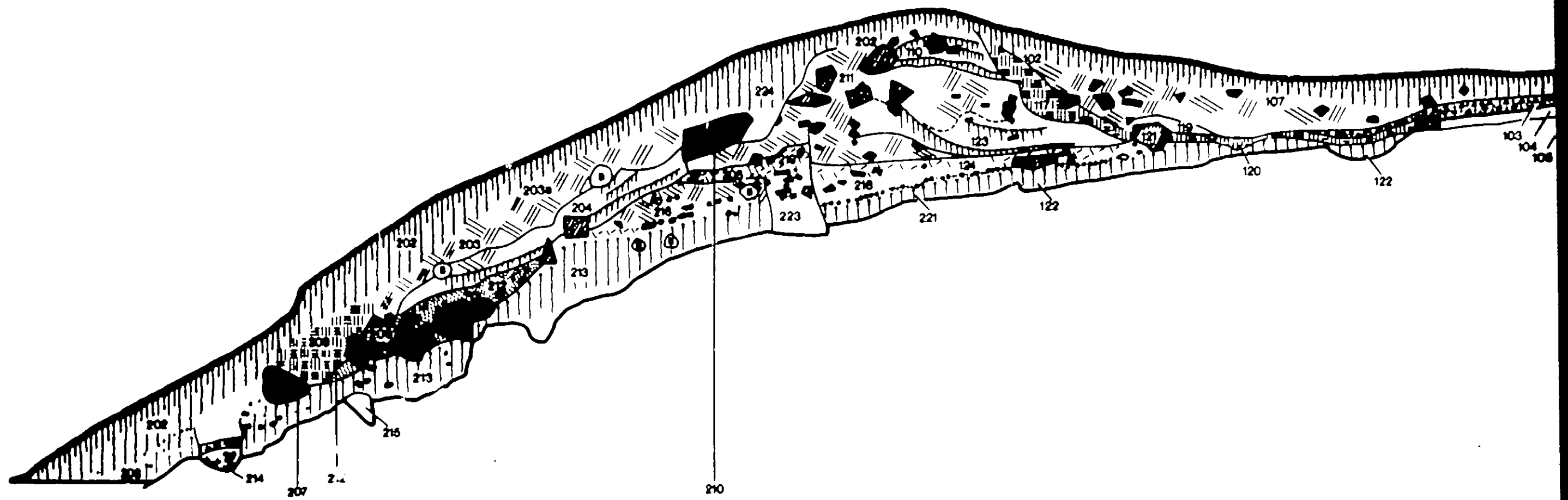
At a later stage, a second 'repair' took place (210). The cut for this, with its fill of loose weathered brown loam (224) was clearly visible. A line of large boulders ran across the trench; below it was a group of smaller stones which might have fallen from the wall face. Whether these stones were the lower courses of a stone wall, or simply a revetment could not be ascertained.

### THE LANCER

To the rear of the rampart, there was no true quarry ditch, but the turf in this area was much thinner than elsewhere in the trench, and it is evident that sods had been stripped off a broad zone in order to provide rampart material for Period 2. The loss of soil cover was undoubtedly exacerbated by subsequent natural erosion enhanced by ploughing.

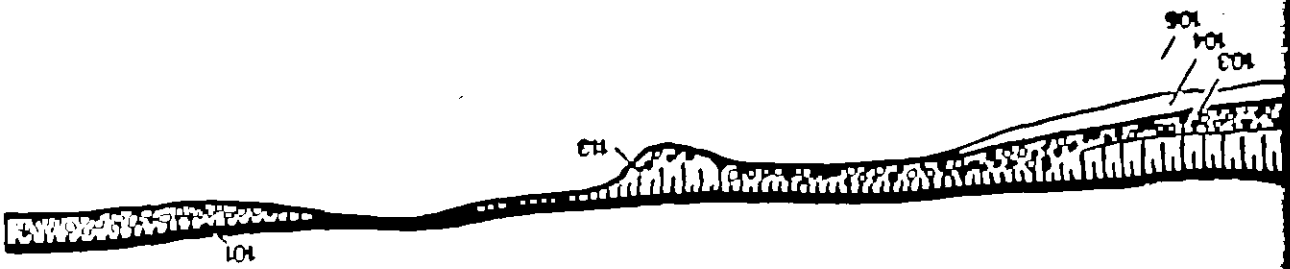
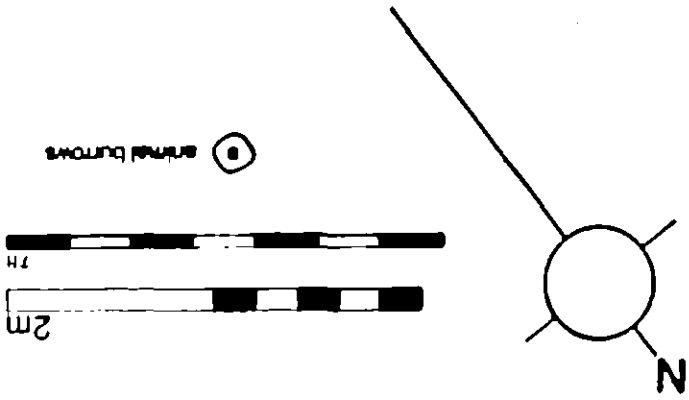
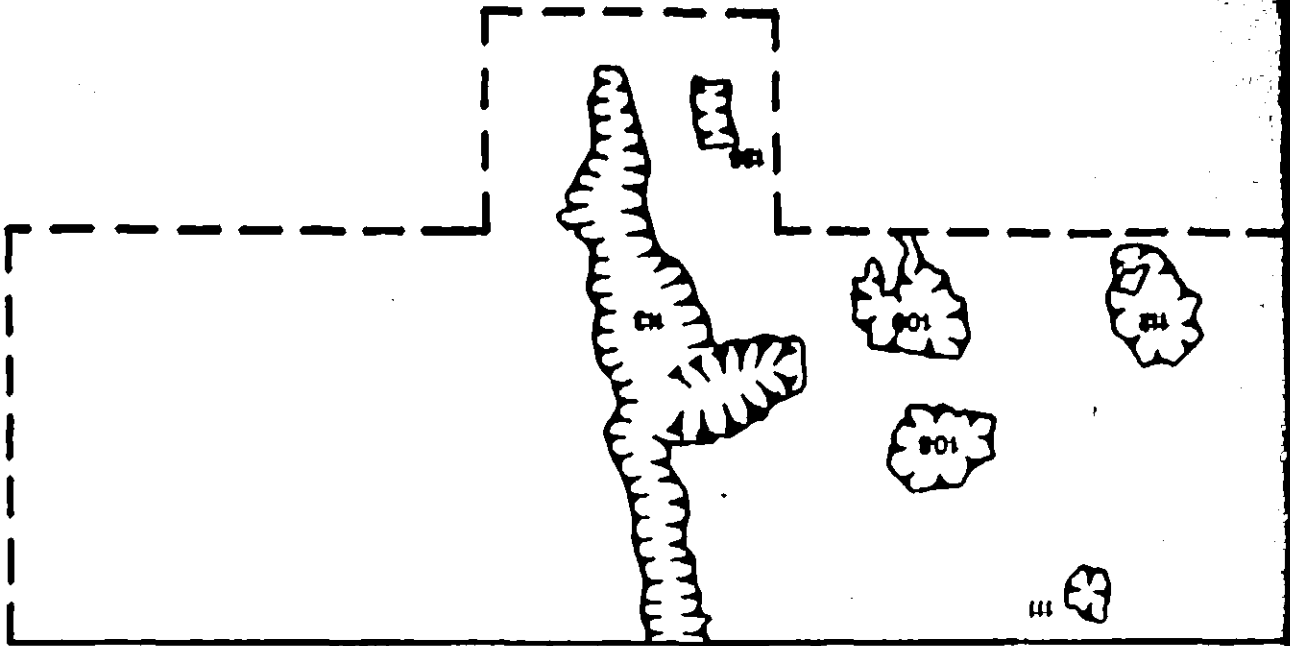
Behind the rampart, several features were noted cut into the bedrock (illus 17). These comprised several sub-rectangular post-holes (108, 109, 111, 112, 125) varying in depth from 180 to 450mm; a concentration of charcoal behind 112 (115); a triangular depression with a stony fill (106), 180mm deep, each side c.300mm long; and a Slot (113) of irregular width (240-330mm wide, 170mm deep) which ran across the trench, parallel to the rampart. One of its terminals was

uncovered, and projecting northwards from part way along the slot, and almost at right angles, was a short section of a wider slot (380-450mm wide, 210mm deep). The fill was an orangey-brown soil with pebbles. It is impossible to ascribe these internal structural features to any contemporary phase of rampart construction (indeed, the disparate techniques of trench-built walls and separate earth-fast posts probably represent two periods of building activity). Parallel with slot 113, but directly behind the rampart, extended a line of stones (107), about 700-950mm wide. This is interpreted as the dry-stone sill for a horizontal timber beam, one side of a building the opposite side of which has been ploughed away (note the extent of the later rig and furrow on illus 15). This feature is ascribable to a phase after the construction, and perhaps even after severe erosion, of the Period 2 turf rampart.



ILLUS 17 Kirk Hill, rampart section

1 : PS-5



LIST OF FEATURES IN TRENCH 100/200, KIRK HILL

Illus 17 (fiche 1:F3-5)

S = Section P = Plan

- 101 = 201 Turf (S)
- 102 = 202 Friable loam with small pebbles. Weathered top-soil (S).
- 103 Rooty loam with numerous small pebbles, some charcoal (S).
- 104 Weathered ORS Lava (S).
- 105 ORS Lava bedrock (S,P).
- 106 Stony soil. Triangular depression.
- 107 Sandy soil with densely packed stones (beach cobbles and angular slabs) and charcoal. Dry-stone sill for ?timber-beam (S,P)
- 108 Dark clayey soil with small concentration of charcoal. Post-hole (P).
- 109 Brown clay soil with a few pebbles. Post-hole (P).
- 110 = 123, 203, 204, 211. Alternating layers of turf and orange soil, some stones. Turf rampart (S).
- 111 Pebble-free soil. Post-hole (P).
- 112 Clayey soil with chippy stones and packing stones surround. Post-hole (P)
- 113 Orangey-brown earth with pebbles, some charcoal. Building slot (S,P).
- 115 Charcoal concentration behind 112.
- 116 Pinkish clay with small pebbles. Natural feature behind 112.
- 117 Compact orange clay. Capping for turf rampart (S).
- 118 Winkle collection in 119.
- 119 Dark brown-black loam, ash and charcoal at base. ?Erosion of turf rampart (S)
- 120 Streaky orange layer. ?Erosion of turf rampart (S).
- 121 Band of boulders. Kerb for turf rampart (S).
- 122 = 221, 213. Dark grey loam. Cultivation layer (S).

- 123 = 110, 203, 204, 211. Sandy soil including turf stack. Turf rampart (S).
- 124 = 216, 218. Dark brown clayey soil. Low bank, either lynchet or man-made bank (S).
- 125 Post-hole (P).
- 201 = 101 (S).
- 202 = 102 Sandy soil with small roots, pebbles at base. Weathered top-soil (S).
- 203 = 110, 123, 204, 211. Light brown consolidated loam, with very small pebbles. Turf rampart (S).
- 204 = 110, 123, 203, 211. Compact orange clayey soil, with charcoal, incorporating several turf stacks. Turf rampart (S).
- 205 Compact black layer with numerous pieces of charcoal. Destruction debris of palisade 223 (S).
- 206 Large pitched slabs, mainly dressed sandstone, with some surrounding charcoal. Toe of dressed stones (S).
- 207 Line of large boulders forming one or two courses. Remains of front revetment to clay and turf rampart (S,P).
- 208 Natural dark soil with chippy pebbles (S).
- 209 Compact orange clayey soil. ?Capping for turf rampart (S).
- 210 Wall of large boulders. Probably late enclosure wall (S,P).
- 211 = 110, 123, 203, 204. Large angular stones, including thin slabs, dispersed in turf layer with some charcoal. Turf rampart (S,P).
- 212 Sandy loam with numerous small chips, pebbles and some charcoal (S).
- 213 = 221, 122. Dark, rich humic soil with chippy stones and much charcoal. Cultivation layer (S).
- 214 Compact layer, variety of soils and clay, with ordered packing stones and numerous chippy pebbles. Palisade trench (S,P).
- 215 Dark soil. Post-hole for rear brace (S).



- 216 = 124, 218. Rubble, comprising beach cobbles and angular stones, very compact in places. Some charcoal. Low bank, either lynchet or man-made (S).
- 217 = ?123. Sandy soil including turf stack. Turf rampart.
- 218 Dark brown clayey soil. Low bank, either lynchet or man-made (S).
- 219 Dark grey soil with some charcoal. Upper fill of palisade trench 223 (S).
- 220 Loosely packed cobbles concentrated in W side of trench at crest of rampart.
- 221 = 213, 122. Light, grey, humic soil. Cultivation layer (S).
- 222 Light brown sandy soil with charcoal flecks and small patches of clay. Directly below 216, in front of 210.
- 223 Chippy, angular and rounded stones in matrix. Palisade trench, lower fill (S).
- 224 Loose, weathered brown loam. Fill of cut for wall 210 (S).

## THE FINDS FROM KIRK HILL

The description of each find is preceded by its context number and special finds register number. Where applicable a discussion follows a particular category of finds; ultimately there is a more general discussion.

### POTTERY

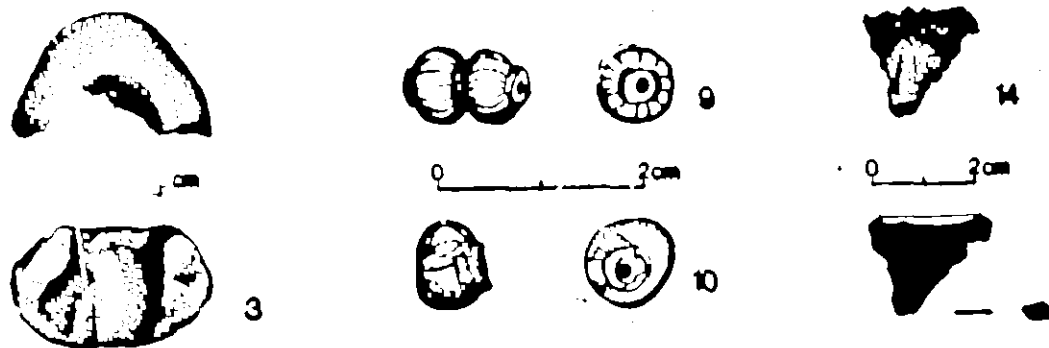
With the exception of no 3, a clay bead or spindle-whorl, none of these pieces was worthy of illustration.

1. KH 102, SF 003. Coarse sandy fabric, buff exterior, orange-red core, with vestiges of glaze (colour unrecognisable). ?Late medieval small jug.
2. KH 119, SF 023. Much abraded, handmade, fine black sandy ware, fired under reducing conditions.
3. KH 119, SF 019, illus 18. Clay bead or spindle-whorl of buff sandy fabric with reduced core.
4. KH 119, SF 025. Indeterminate, much abraded, handmade, black sandy ?burnished ware, fired under reducing conditions.
5. KH 209, SF 004. Well-fired, wheel-thrown, sandy ware with smooth buff exterior (?with slight traces of slip) and grey core. Body sherd of late medieval vessel.
6. KH 213, SF 041. Samian, Dr 33 or Dr 18/31. Body sherd, probably of platter (Dr 18/31), split longitudinally (identified by L.J.F. Keppie).
7. KH 219, SF 037. Orange/buff coarse sandy fabric. Body sherd of ?large Roman jar.

The identification of no 3, SF 019 is a problem. Its size and form suggest a spindle-whorl, but its slightly irregular shape may preclude such a function; a clay bead suggests itself as the obvious alternative. Clay beads are known from Iron Age contexts, such as the

Glastonbury Lake Village (Bulleid and Gray 1917, 560), although these tend to be much smaller in size. This example is probably residual from earlier activity in the vicinity.

Sherds nos 2 and 4, SF 023 and SF 025, are obviously prehistoric, but are so small and abraded that any finer distinction is very difficult. No 5 SF 004 was most difficult to find any parallel for: G R Haggerty, however, (in litt to LA) is fairly confident that it is late medieval. He would guess it belongs with the group of sand tempered fabrics, their origins seemingly in London and the Thames valley area, which were being traded along the east coast of Scotland, a trade at its peak in the twelfth century. This sherd was recovered from KH 209, which was assumed to be the clay capping for the turf rampart, in Period 2. Because of erosion and burrowing, however, it is doubtful whether any reliance can be placed on its location, as was indeed the case with the stratification of most of the Kirk Hill finds.



Illus 18. Finds from Kirk Hill. 3, bead or spindle whorl of fired clay. 9, segmented bead, dark blue glass. 10, segment from foil-in-glass bead. 14, copper-alloy ingate.

#### GLASS

8. Unstratified, SF 011. Splinter of light blue glass.
9. KH 102, SF 001, illus 18. Dark blue double segmented bead with faint longitudinal striations and pinched 'waist'.
10. KH 102, SF 002, illus 18. Single globular section of a segmented bead. Clear glass with white metal (?silver) foil inset.
11. KH 121, SF 031. Splinter of blue glass, ?body sherd.

Two glass beads were recovered from the top soil. One (no 9; illus 18) was a dark blue double segmented example (Guido 1978, fig 37, type 3). Segmented beads were not common until the Roman period (the earliest British example is second-century AD), and their popularity grew during the late Roman and post-Roman period (*ibid*, 91-2; Boon 1977). Examples have been found in Scotland, perhaps as late as the sixth century at Dalmeny (Guido 1978, 204), and Northumbria eg Yeavering (Hope-Taylor 1977, fig 8b, GL 1 and 2). It is therefore impossible to date this bead precisely. Similarly, segmented beads enclosing metal foil (no 10; illus 18; single segment) have a wide date-range in Britain from the second to sixth century AD (Boon 1977; Guido 1978, 205-6), but even occur in Viking contexts eg at Kneep, Lewis (J Close-Brooks *in litt* to LA; Boon 1977, 202). However, silver-in-glass examples, such as possibly at Kirk Hill, are rare in comparison to gold-in-glass examples; the only other British silver example is from the fourth-century cemetery at Lankhills, Winchester (Boon 1977, 199). Both these beads, although unstratified, could have been contemporary with the burh.

#### METAL

Only one of the metal fragments, SF 046, illus 18, 14 was diagnostic or capable of illustration.

#### COPPER ALLOY

12. KH 119, SF 020; KH 218, SF 035. Two globules, respectively 4 and 3mm diameter.
13. KH 219, SF 033. Small unidentifiable fragment
14. KH 218, SF 046. Ingate from a bi-valve mould (cf. Curle 1982 (1) 21, 451a).

Unless the stratification has been disturbed, eg by rabbits, this piece of evidence for bronze-working precedes even the Period 1 rear palisade, and may belong to the Romano-British activity indicated by pottery and glass

**IRON:**

15. KH 119, SF 024. Sub-circular, corroded, flat fragment.
16. KH 119, SF 027. Rivet.
17. KH 205, SF 032. Length of strip. ?Narrow blade.

**LEAD:**

18. KH 101, SF 012. Amorphous fragment of lead, 13.4g.
19. KH 113, SF 052. Amorphous fragment of lead, 4.2g.

**SLAG**

20. KH 119, SF 018 and SF 025: 1.5g.
- KH 204, SF 026: 3.8g.
- KH 209, SF 022: 3.5g.
- KH 213, SF 051: 117.24g.
- KH 214, SF 049: 15.3g.
- KH 218, SF 045: 9.4g.
- KH 219, SF 043 and 053: 5.1g.
- KH 221, SF 047 and 054: 22.6g.

**STONE**

Nos 21-27 were examined and identified geologically by Dr M G Jardine, Department of Geology, University of Glasgow.

21. Unstratified, SF 057. Sub-cubical block of red micaceous sandstone, 26 x 24 x 16mm. The cuboid shape may be the result of natural fracture, but its regularity suggests the possibility that this could be a Roman tessera.
22. KH 102, SF 005. Elongated pebble of sandstone, or possibly reddened greywacke; sub-triangular cross-section. Although this pebble is suitable for a whetstone, there is no evidence that it was utilized. Length 80mm.
23. KH 103, SF 010. Possible small whetstone of micaceous sandstone. The fairly regular long rectangular shape and trapezoid cross-section would be suitable for a whetstone, but it is not certain that this was so utilized. Length 90mm.
24. KH 107, SF 015. Exceptionally large whetstone. A boulder of greywacke, roughly rectangular and of sub-triangular cross-section, has 2 faces heavily utilized for whetting. Length 250mm.
25. KH 211, SF 017. Fragment of a whetstone of sandstone or reddened greywacke. An elongated pebble has one face dished through use as a whetstone. Length 150mm.
26. KH 103, SF 029. An elongated pebble of sandstone, with sub-triangular cross-section, may possibly have been used as a whetstone. Length 73mm.
27. KH 121, SF 030. An irregular elongated pebble, probably of sandstone rather than greywacke, has been heavily used for whetting on 2 out of 4 faces. Length 165mm.
28. KH 200 (ie unstratified), SF 056. Thin, ovoid pebble, probably of greywacke, with one main face dished through use as a whetstone. Length 145mm.
29. KH 221, SF 044. Small slab of sandstone, one end covered in glassy slag.

Elongated pebbles of sandstone or greywacke, with two or three flattish faces, suitable for use as whetstones, occur naturally around St Abb's Head. Some of those found in the excavations had certainly been utilized for whetting, but others recorded here show no definite

signs of this. None of them is in a context earlier than the raising of the Period 2 clay-and-turf rampart.

Even the best of the Kirk Hill examples is less regular, especially in cross-section, than whetstones reported from Early Christian secular sites such as Dinas Powys (Alcock 1963, fig 35) or monasteries such as Reask (Fanning 1981, fig 25). Still less can they compare with the schist hones from Viking-influenced sites such as York (MacGregor 1978, fig 22). It has not therefore been thought necessary to illustrate what is no more than a group of utilized pebbles.

#### DRESSED STONES (ILLUS 8)

Ten blocks of pink or pale yellow sandstone, all worked on one or more surfaces, were recovered from KH 206, the toe for the Period 2 rampart. These were photographed, and measured sketches were drawn: the blocks were then re-buried at the lower end of the trench. Four characteristic examples are shown in the Summary Report, illus 8.

30. KH 206. Long thin block, roughly shaped, sub-rectangular slots cut in one face, perhaps for wooden tenons rather than lewis or cramp holes.
31. KH 206. Deep, well-squared block, with coarse axe marks on the top and bottom surfaces: finer tooling on the main face, where a band 25mm wide has been left undressed at the left edge.
32. KH 206. Roughly rectangular block with shallow tooling.
33. KH 206. Small rectangular block, with coarse tooling on the edge only: the main faces are natural fracture planes.
- 34-39. KH 206. The remaining dressed sandstone blocks are not considered worthy of illustration here. Measured sketches and both colour and monochrome photographs have been deposited with the site archives in the Glasgow University Archives.

Several scholars have kindly examined photographs of the stones, but opinion is divided as to their date. T. Blagg (in litt to LA) sees

the tooling as consistent with that of Roman military stonemasons in north Britain. He suggests that a large building, possibly a fort, was the source. The stones, although much battered by reuse and weathering, are only roughly dressed (quarry dressed as opposed to finished) using a mason's point and probably an axe or adze, which was the norm for ordinary walling stone, particularly on the Roman northern frontier. Rodwell (in litt to LA) considers the whole collection, in our present state of structural knowledge, to be more credible as Roman work than as anything later. He has pointed out that the mortices on stone 30 (illus 8) are not lewis or cramp holes, nor the right shape to be considered as mortices for masonry tenons. He assumes rather that they were intended to receive wooden tenons, and that the scale and spacing is suggestive of studwork; the stone could therefore be part of a stylobate or sill which carried a stud wall or screen. If this is so then one is faced with the dilemma of finding the place of origin of this worked stone, because no Roman sites are known anywhere near St Abb's Head. There is perhaps a case here for the existence of an isolated Roman building, as yet undetected.

Examples of such isolated buildings which have yielded Roman dressed masonry are known, for instance, at Easter Langlee (Steer 1966) and on or near Ruberslaw (Curle 1905), both in Roxburghshire. Both buildings were distant from Roman roads and are therefore more likely to have been rural temples than military installations. If we were to press for a nearby Roman source for the Kirk Hill stones, then again a rural temple may be more likely than a signal-station, though a lighthouse should not be excluded. On the other hand, some of the dressed blocks at Ruberslaw still bear traces of mortar, reminding us that a Roman masonry building is likely to have used lime mortar. The absence of any vestiges of mortar at Kirk Hill argues therefore against a Roman source.

This therefore brings us to the second possibility that the dressed stones had been intended for the Anglian monastery. Cramp (in



litt to LA) can parallel the dressings on the masonry with examples from the Northumbrian monastery of Jarrow, but considers that such dressing (which is only after all to quarry level) has a wide date-range.

In conclusion, there is nothing about the tooling and finish of these stones which can be regarded as being distinctive of a particular period. They do indeed bear comparison with Roman examples, but bear no traces of mortar as evidence of such a primary use. On the other hand the corpus of dated Anglo-Saxon masonry (as opposed to sculpture) is negligible. The time most likely for such stone to be available (particularly in a quarry-dressed state) would be during the construction of the Anglo-Saxon monastery itself.

#### DISCUSSION OF FINDS

Owing to extensive rabbit burrowing of the rampart it is, unfortunately, impossible to place much reliance on the stratigraphy, even of those finds which appear to be stratified. There was, however, one closely stratified find, a sherd of Samian (either a Dragendorff 33 cup or a Dragendorff 18/31 platter; no 6). A date in the second century AD is likely for this sherd. At best, however, it only provides us with a terminus post quem for Period 2, under whose toe of dressed stones (206) it lay; it is probably residual from earlier agricultural activity on the hill.

The same inference applies to the two sherds of prehistoric pottery (nos 2 and 4), although they could of course be representative of prehistoric occupation on the hill.

The residual Roman pottery, possible Roman glass beads, the earlier finds of a Romano-British rim-herd and glass bangle (see above) and the reused quarry dressed masonry (206) of possible Roman date, might all be considered to imply a Roman presence on the hill or in the vicinity. This might have been in the form of cultivation

represented by the horizon 213/221/122, and perhaps related to one of the numerous enclosed settlements or farmsteads which are well known around Coldingham (illus 2, 11; ASM Berwicks items 185, 189, 250, 251, 254, 263-6, 274). The masonry itself may suggest a temple or lighthouse.

The glass beads are as likely to belong to the sixth or later centuries and could thus be contemporary with the proposed burh, or even the monastery (to which the quarry dressed masonry could also reasonably belong). There were, however, no finds peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon period.

There had obviously been some medieval agricultural activity on the hill as witness the rig and furrow marks (illus 15) and this would account for the occasional sherd of later medieval pottery.

#### DISCUSSION OF KIRK HILL

The Period 1 palisades are either two successive single ones or a unitary double palisade. Parallels for the latter can be found in the Great Enclosure at Yeavinger (Hope-Taylor 1977, phase IV, fig 26) and its ancestors, such as Harehope II (Feachen 1960, fig 4; Alcock 1979, 136). At Harehope the lack of Roman material, and the continuity between phases I and II have been considered as holding the building and occupation of the double palisades to the first century AD at the latest (Feachen 1960, 191). Hope-Taylor (1977, 208), however, would have liked to have been able to see its origins in a Roman military work, in which case it might have been third or fourth century. At Yeavinger itself the Great Enclosure came into precise stratigraphical relationship with post-Roman structures, otherwise it too would have been ascribed to the pre-Roman period (*ibid*). It is, however, dated by the excavator to between c.250 and 500 AD (*ibid*, 209). Although the suggested double palisade at Kirk Hill was not so wide as either the Yeavinger or Harehope examples (c. 5m in comparison to c.8.4 and 7.8m respectively) it does indeed seem to be in the basic British tradition

of palisaded forts, a tradition which either survived through the Roman period or was revived after it. In common with Harehope, palisade A may have been dug into a specially constructed low mound (216, 218, 124; Peachen 1960, fig 7); however, the suggestion that this more stony soil possibly marks a reversion to grassland before the erection of a timber palisade cannot be precluded.

Of course, the palisaded enclosure at Kirk Hill was not necessarily a double one. The evidence, tenuous as it is from such a narrow trench, suggests that the front palisade, B, which was braced, had decayed in situ, whilst the rear unbraced palisade, A, had obviously been burnt. The two palisades differ also in constructional techniques. Palisade B had a shallower trench than palisade A, and its posts had been packed with stones rather than with gravelly soil. Given the different constructional techniques and different fates of these two timber palisades, it seems likely that the timber palisade stage, Period 1, consisted of two successive timber palisades.

There are several radiocarbon dates from palisade A (see above). The two mixed charcoal samples averaged  $1275 \pm 85$  bp at the two-sigma level (GU 1388 and 1389) on the 5568 half-life. This had previously been calibrated by Alcock (Alcock and Alcock 1981) to 630 - 770 AD using Clark's 1975 curve. Calibration using more recent tables (Klein et al 1982) gives a wider date bracket of 590-900 AD at the two-sigma (ie 95% certainty) level, and slightly alters any inferences which can be made. There is therefore a 19:20 chance that palisade A was not built before 590 AD. Before this date is accepted too seriously, however, it should be noted that the Belfast oak chronology shows that this is a period of marked fluctuations in the  $^{14}\text{C}$  curve. For a later dating limit we may turn to wider considerations. Kirk Hill is now the best candidate for the pre-monastic fort implied by the name Colodæsburg, on the assumption that an Anglo-Saxon might have called a single or double palisaded fort a byrh (Bede's use of urba here is simply his translation of byrh) (Campbell 1979a). On this basis,

either or both of the palisades would have been in existence before Aebbe founded, or at least presided over, the monastery. (There is no historical evidence for the date of this, but see below for a possible chronology).

It is indeed feasible, on the evidence of the radiocarbon dates, that the burned palisade A formed the initial enclosure of the monastery, subsequently to be replaced by the substantial turf and clay bank. At Iona, an initial slight ditch was later replaced by a massive bank and ditch (Barber 1981, 356). On this analogy, the community at Colodaesburg may originally have lacked the resources, whether of money or manpower, needed to build the major earthwork of Period 2; they may therefore have had to be content with a palisaded enclosure.

On the other hand, if palisade A had been standing as a pre-monastic secular defence when the monastery was founded, or had been erected immediately thereafter as the original monastic enclosure, it seems likely that its timber would have been salvaged, rather than burned off, before the Period 2 rampart was built. If this argument is accepted, then it is reasonable to see both palisades, whether separately or as a pair, as pre-monastic in date. Indeed, we might infer that they were already too decayed to salvage at the beginning of Period 2. If we think of them as two successive works, then it is not possible to establish which is the earlier.

It is of some interest to ask whether the palisaded fort was Anglian or British. Towards the end of the sixth century the Anglian kingdom of Bernicia was expanding under Aethelfrith, and by AD 638 its powers had extended to the Firth of Forth, with the capture of Etin (Edinburgh). Was Colodaesburg therefore a British refuge built during the years of Anglian advance (as the non-Anglian name might suggest); or an Anglian fortification constructed in the same period, but by subservient Britons? As long ago as 1936 Myres (Collingwood and Myres 1936, 421-2) considered St Abb's and Bamburgh as 'impregnable fortresses', acting as Anglian bases in the military domination of

Northumberland. The rear palisade at Kirk Hill had certainly been burned and it may be that the burning reflects military activity during the Anglian advance. Alcock (1981a) notes the destruction of other Early Historic fortifications in Scotland by burning.

As an aside, the spread of Anglian domination in Northumbria must have some bearing on when the monastery at Kirk Hill was established. A foundation date before AD 638 may seem unlikely since it was only then that Edinburgh and the Lothians came under Anglian control. Although there is no documentary evidence to back the proposal that Aebbe founded Colodaesburg, it would seem a reasonable assumption. In AD 643 Aebbe's brother, Oswy, succeeded to the kingdom of Bernicia, and he would therefore have been ideally placed to endow his sister with the land upon which to found a monastic establishment. The fort represented by Palisade A, if antecedent to the monastery, could therefore be dated provisionally in the range AD 590-643.

Whether palisade A was pre-monastic or monastic in date, it cannot have been long after its destruction that a turf rampart, secondarily faced with a sizeable stone revetment, was erected. This is perfectly plausible as the yallum monasterii of St Aebbe's house, although the possibilities that it is earlier or even drastically later cannot be wholly excluded. An immediate parallel would be the large bank and ditch at Glastonbury (Cramp 1976, 244), which presumably surrounded the monastery there; its bank was approximately the same width at its base as that on Kirk Hill (c 7m).

The replacement of the palisade or palisades by a clay and turf rampart inevitably recalls the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle account (ca 547) of Ida building Bamburgh 'which was first enclosed with a hedge and afterwards with a wall'. Alcock formerly argued that the ASC was here using a late source, which had been influenced by experience of the building history of Late Saxon burghs, where the original timber revetments were later replaced by stone walls (1981a). Radford (1978) describes the evidence for this at several burghs, including Hereford

and Cricklade. It is now necessary to reconsider this view. If the hedge at Bamburgh was in fact a palisade, may not this also have been built by the Britons some decades earlier than phase 1B at Kirk Hill? Pertinent to this is the British name for Bamburgh, Dinguaroy, given in the Historia Brittonum the din- element clearly implying a fort.

At some stage, undoubtedly during the short life-time of the monastery, it was necessary to repair the front of the turf rampart with a boulder wall, the lower courses of which were still extant upon excavation. At a later stage a line of boulders was inserted into the crest of the rampart, but this was probably a field wall.

The internal features would appear to belong to at least two phases (see above). It is, however, impossible to ascribe the majority of them to any of the rampart phases. One feature, 107, a stone footing for a timber sill, post-dates the building of the Period 2 rampart, but by how long a period is uncertain.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The excavations proved that Rampart Hill, the site traditionally associated with St Aebbe's monastery of Colodasburg, was more probably a late-medieval defended promontory refuge. The preferred candidate for Colodasburg is now Kirk Hill. Here, three, and possibly five, phases of fortification were noted, commencing with a palisade fort of British design, presumably 'Colod's fort or town'. This consisted of two single palisaded enclosures, the upper one, A, commencing no earlier than c AD590 on the basis of radiocarbon dates. It was succeeded by a clay and turf rampart resting on a stone toe, probably the vallum monasterii of Aebbe's monastery, later strengthened at the front with a stone revetment. A probable field wall later followed the crest of the rampart. The interior of the enclosure was not investigated extensively, but some evidence was found for ranges of buildings parallel to the rampart; and traces of masonry buildings and enclosures are visible on the ground. If the identification of Kirk

Hill as Colodæsburg is correct, then a major Northumbrian monastery, unencumbered by numerous later structures, lies open for exploration.

APPENDIX 1: CHARCOAL IDENTIFICATIONS BY CAMILLA A DICKSON

Charcoal collected from KH 205 for radiocarbon assay was identified as follows:

- Betula (birch)      c 1.84g, from stem or branch diam c 20-40mm
- Corylus (hazel)      c 7.2g, from stem or branch, two pieces with bark, age 5-10 years, diam c 10-20mm.
- Quercus (oak)      c 31.2g, from stem or branch and larger timber, diam c 15-200mm. 1 piece, c 15mm, appears to be from a stem or branch, the other pieces could have derived from one piece of timber or from small (c 20-40mm) and larger timber. Due to distortion in growth and firing not many of the pieces of larger diameter could be measured.
- No fungal hyphae were noted and there was no evidence seen of differential preservation to suggest that the wood was rotten.
- Salix (willow)      c 1.2g, from timber c 140mm + diam.
- Unidentified small fragments c 178.4g.
- Weight is of damp charcoal.